Basilica of St. Josaphat
601 West Lincoln Avenue
Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WIS-258

HABS
WIS,
40-MILWA,
28-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS, WIS, 40-MILWA, 28-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. WIS-258

BASILICA OF ST. JOSAPHAT

Location: 601 West Lincoln Avenue (southwest corner of West Lincoln Avenue and South Sixth Street), Milwaukee Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Present Owner and Occupant: Basilica of St. Josaphat

Statement of Significance: This grand, imposing, richly ornamented Neo-Renaissance edifice is a major landmark of Milwaukee's south side, the only Roman Catholic basilica in Wisconsin, and one of the nation's most important Polish-American churches.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1896-1901. The application for the building permit (No. 556) is dated September 19, 1896. On July 4, 1897, the cornerstone was laid, and on July 21, 1901, the church was dedicated by Sebastian Cardinal Martinelli.

2. Architects: Erhard Brielmaier and Sons, Milwaukee. A. native of Germany, Erhard J. Brielmaier (1841-1917) came to Ohio with his family in 1850. He learned carpentry while living in Cincinnati and, in 1865, opened an architectural office in Piqua, Ohio. Coming to Milwaukee in 1873, he established an architectural practice specializing in church design. The Brielmaier firm reportedly designed eight hundred churches throughout the United States.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The building was erected for St. Josaphat's parish. Since 1910 it has been under the management of the Franciscan Fathers Minor Conventual.

4. Builders and suppliers: Erhard Brielmaier also served as contractor and personally supervised the construction work, carried out, largely, by men of the parish. Most of the building materials were salvaged from the old Federal Building in Chicago.

5. Original plans: According to Jack Sherer of the Brielmaier, Sherer and Sherer architectural firm, the original

plans, elevations, sections, and details (drawings on cloth, vellum, and backed paper, dated 1896) together with shop drawings for the steel framing of the dome are on file at the firm's offices, 660 East Mason Street, Milwaukee. He also reports that the original color rendering of the exterior is in a local private collection. A pencil perspective rendering of the exterior, not precisely as built, signed by Joseph Brielmaier, is exhibited in the basilica rectory office, 2333 South Sixth Street.

6. Alterations and additions: When St. Josaphat's was dedicated, the interior was all but devoid of painted and sculptured ornament: walls, columns, and ceilings were painted alabaster white. In 1904 the church obtained its first painting, the "Martyrdom of St. Josaphat," executed by J. S. Zukotynski of Chicago and located behind and above the main altar. Most of the present dazzling ornamentation dates from a $125,000 project that began in September 1926, was directed by Gonippo Raggi, a Roman artist, and was largely completed before consecration of the church in 1928. Detailed accounts and illustrations of the numerous paintings appear in the Souvenir Album of 1951 and The Basilica of St. Josaphat Bishop and Martyr listed below. The splendid marble pulpit may also come from this period, while the stained glass windows, all imported from Innsbruck, Austria, are believed to have been installed before the mid-1920s.

   In more recent years the following alterations have been made:

   a. 1938 (Building Permit No. 16503): At this time the brick work under the front (north) stairs was replaced with concrete, and the granite treads were also replaced. The $1,000 project was carried out by H. Schmitt and Son, Inc., contractor.

   b. 1940-42: In 1940 defective wiring caused a fire in the lower basilica, extensively damaging this area and causing smoke damage in the upper (main) church. Gonippo Raggi supervised repairs to the paintings, and in 1942 the lower basilica was renovated, a terrazzo floor installed in place of the original wooden flooring, new fixtures installed, and the walls painted. At the same time the sanctuary and altar on this level were modified.

   c. 1947-51: In the summer of 1947 lightning struck the basilica and dislodged some of the stone work at the southeast corner of the dome. Repairs to this section

and then to the entire edifice were undertaken between 1947 and 1951. The contractor was H. Schmitt and Son, Inc.

d. c. 1961: The interior of the basilica was renovated.

e. 1962 (Building Permit No. 12503): This permit records construction of a stock room in the lower church by Anton Uniewski, contractor.

f. 1967-68: During this period the exterior of the basilica was cleaned and silicone treated. A new gas heating system was installed and the old radiators removed by Joseph Lehman, contractor. In the upper (main) basilica the sanctuary was extended to the north (into the church), the steps from nave to sanctuary level changed, and the communion rail moved forward. The marble floors in the vestibule and aisles, which had worn unevenly, were filled, covered, and carpeted; the bishop's throne in the sanctuary was removed; a new organ was installed. The lower level also saw some remodelling. Father Constantine Zielinski of St. Josaphat's supervised the alterations, and artistic coordination was in the hands of the Conrad Schmitt Studios of Milwaukee.

g. Unspecified dates: The present doors in the portals joining vestibule and church proper were installed, and the transept entrances were modified on the exterior.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

As noted, many of the materials used in the construction of St. Josaphat's originally constituted Chicago's Federal Building (this structure is illustrated in both the Souvenir Album of 1951 and The Basilica of St. Josaphat Bishop and Martyr of 1952). The transformation from public building to church came about as follows. By the mid-1890s Father William Grutza and his parishioners at St. Josaphat's agreed that the parish needed a new church and retained Erhard Brielmaier to draw the plans. While his work was in progress, Father Grutza travelled to Chicago, where he learned that the aging Federal Building was soon to be razed and the materials offered for sale. Aware that the parish could realize a considerable savings if salvaged materials were used, he asked Brielmaier if he would modify his plans accordingly (the architect's original scheme called for a

brick building trimmed with terra cotta). Brielmaier complied, and for $20,000 Father Grutza purchased stone for the walls, polished granite columns for the front portico, doors, hardware, bronze railings, and light fixtures and had them transported to Milwaukee on five hundred railway flatcars. Inspected, measured, sorted, and numbered, all these materials eventually found places in the new fabric.

St. Josaphat's was consecrated on November 18, 1928, by Bishop Paul Rhode of Creen Bay, Wisconsin, in the presence of George Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago. On March 10, 1929, Pope Pius XI elevated St. Josaphat's Church to the dignity of Minor Basilica. It is one of only three in the United States. The papal decree is preserved at the basilica. The ceremony of elevation took place on January 25, 1931, in the presence of Samuel Cardinal Stritch of Ghicago.

In 1969 St. Josaphat's was designated a Milwaukee Landmark by the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission and was the subject of Wisconsin Assembly Joint Resolution 49, passed by both the Senate and Assembly in 1969, urging that the State Historical Society of Wisconsin declare the edifice a state historical landmark.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: There is a fine collection of early photographs, including views of the edifice under construction, preserved at the basilica rectory, 2333 South Sixth Street. A number of these photos, a view of the exterior in 1901, overall views of the interior on July 21, 1901, and after the 1920s, photos of the paintings, stained glass, and lower basilica were published in the Souvenir Album of 1951 and most of them re-published in The Basilica of St. Josaphat Bishop and Martyr, issued one year later.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Building permits and other records, 1896-1967, General Office, Inspector of Buildings, 1010 Municipal Building, Milwaukee.

Inspection of the fabric and interview with Father Constantine Zielinski, St. Josaphat's Basilica, August 12, 1969.

Interview with Jack Sherer, Brielmaier, Sherer and Sherer, Architects, Milwaukee, August 25, 1969.

Sanasarian, Harout O. (Wisconsin State Assemblyman), letter to recorder, June 26, 1969.

b. Secondary and published sources:

"Cardinal Will Officiate Here," Milwaukee Journal, November 17, 1928, 9.

History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Chicago, 1881.

"Honor is Paid to Mundelein," Milwaukee Journal, November 19, 1928, 14.

"In the Legislature . . .," Milwaukee Journal, July 19, 1969, 24.

Kaluzny, The Rev. Pius and Bonikowski, The Rev. Samuel (edd.), The Basilica of St. Josaphat Bishop and Martyr, Milwaukee, 1952.

Milwaukee City Directory.

"Milwaukee Creets Cardinal Martinelli for the First Time," Milwaukee Journal, July 20, 1901, 1.

Milwaukee Writers' Project, History of Milwaukee County, Milwaukee, 1947, 544-547.

Pagel, Mary Ellen and Palmer, Virginia A., Guides to Historic Milwaukee: Walker's Point and South, Milwaukee, 1969, 22, 23.

Perrin, Richard W. E., Milwaukee Landmarks, Milwaukee, 1968, 10-11.

"Public Hearings . . .," Milwaukee Journal, July 9, 1969, 12.

"St. Josaphat's Dedicated," Milwaukee Journal, July 22, 1901, 3.

"St. Josaphat's Is Dedicated," Milwaukee Sentinel, July 22, 1901, 2.

Souvenir Album of the Golden Jubilee of the Dedication of St. Josaphat's Basilica 1901-1951, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1951

"Welcome Him on Bended Knee," Milwaukee Sentinel, July 21, 1901, 1, 6.

Prepared by Mary Ellen Wietczykowski
1111 North Astor Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
September 1, 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This richly decorated neo-Renaissance design based upon a centrally planned church has as its dominant feature a huge copper-covered dome raised upon a drum. This dome, supposedly patterned after the domed St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, has four large clocks facing the points of the compass.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main portion of the church is 180 feet 9 inches in length (north-south) and 127 feet in width (east-west). The front portico and steps increase the north-south dimension to 212 feet 10 inches. The dome rises to a height of 250 feet, and the circumference is reported to be 240 feet. The twin bell towers of the front facade rise to a height of 100 feet.

2. Foundation: Foundation walls are stone; footings are assumed to be stone also.

3. Wall construction: The walls are faced with cut limestone that was salvaged from the old Chicago Federal Building. The size of the blocks and their quantity were among the determining factors on the size and shape of the basilica. The limestone is finished in a variety of ways: The quoins have smooth rustication with chamfered edges; wall surfaces have either a bush-hammer finish with chisled edges or are smoothly dressed.

There are applied pilasters having Corinthian caps between the windows and on the corners of the building.

The north facade has a large pedimented portico supported on six huge Corinthian columns of polished granite resting upon base blocks. The pediment has a row of dentil mouldings and paired brackets while the tympanum is undecorated.

4. Framing: Masonry bearing wall construction

5. Chimneys: None

6. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: On the north (front) facade there are five pairs of panelled doors each having two small rectangular transom lights. Above the doorways, and separated from them by five sets of paired, round-arched windows, are five rectangular stone panels. The second and fourth of these panels have bas-relief sculpture; the remaining three are plain. Paired panelled doors lead into each of the transepts from the north. A storm door and vestibule are later additions to these entrances. On the east and west elevations there are paired panelled doors that lead into the basement beneath the main portico and front steps. There is a rear (south) door that opens into a connecting passageway to the parish house to the south behind the church.

   b. Windows: The windows have wooden tracery and stained glass set in semi-circular stone arches. The extremely large window at each transept is divided into four vertical panels and crowned by a large wheel window set into a semi-circular masonry surround with bush-hammered voussoirs.

      Also of note are the similar, smaller, stained-glass windows, the arches of which have a decorative keystone. Above the front portico there is a large wheel window. The basement windows are stained glass with a segmental head.

      There are two rows of windows in the drum beneath the dome, but many of the windows in the lower row have been bricked-in. The top row of windows have slightly arched heads with keystones while the second (lower) row windows are arched. There are pilasters

framing both rows of windows in the drum. A semi-circular skylight forms part of the roof of the main apse.

7. Roof: The central dome, the half domes of the triple apsidal end, the remainder of the roof of the nave, and the hipped roofs of the bell towers are all copper, now tarnished green.

   The dome consists of an inner and an outer shell; the framing is steel. The stone drum beneath the dome is carried internally on pendentives. Four large clocks face the points of the compass at the intersection of dome and drum.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

   a. Basement: Beneath the basilica is a church which is reached by entrances under the front portico. There is no furnace room, as heat is provided by the boilers in the school on the west, adjacent to the basilica.

   b. First floor: The first floor plan is basically square with the dome centrally located. Pendentives transmit the load of the dome and drum to eight large piers, each of which has a single three-quartered engaged pseudo-marble column with a Corinthian capital. The side aisles are defined by these piers.

      There is cross vaulting except in the central bay of the transepts and the central bay of the rear nave and vestibule--these have barrel vaults. There is a star vault in front of the main apse. The south end of the building is triple apsidal.

      The choir loft above the rear nave is reached by steps from that area. There is a decorative cast-iron railing across the front of the choir loft. The vestibule and the auditorium are raised four steps above the front entry.

      In the southeast corner of the church there is an ornately carved, white marble, free-standing pulpit reached by a curving staircase. The main altar is marble while its baldachino and the baptistery are of finely-carved wood. The communion rail is marble.

2. Staircases: A flight of four steps leads from the entry to the actual vestibule. On either side of the vestibule "U"-shaped stairs lead to the choir loft above.

3. Flooring: The main church floor was originally blocks of alternating black and white marble. Due to uneven wear the floors were first covered with plywood, then with carpeting. The steps to the choir loft are covered with linoleum.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The base is plaster painted a beige color, but the walls and vaults are richly painted and gilded. Blue is the basic accent color. The walls, coffered ceiling of the barrel-vaulted vestibule, drum, pendentives and the inner shell of the dome itself, some 150 feet above the main floor, are richly treated with religious murals, sculptured plaster, and bas-relief figures.

   The three-quarter engaged columns of the piers that support the dome are of plaster, grained and painted to simulate marble. They rest upon true marble bases.

5. Doorways and doors: In the rear of the nave there are five doorways, each having two doors, and encased by elaborate pilasters with Corinthian capitals and an ornate entablature. These doors give access from the vestibule into the church proper. They are slab doors with a diamond-shaped light and are probably not original. The lintels above them on the vestibule side of the wall are simply treated in comparison with those on the other side. On the side of the basilica, two other doorways lead into the transepts. These are paired panelled walnut doors, the trim of which is highly molded and of oak.

6. Hardware: Brass

7. Lighting: Electric

8. Heating: Steam

D. Site:

The basilica is located on the corner of South Sixth Street and Lincoln Avenue and is oriented to the north. A parish house is connected to the church by a passageway to the south. The parochial school is located west of the basilica.

Prepared by John N. DeHaas, Jr.
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
August 21, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1969 Milwaukee Project which was sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, and the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission of the City of Milwaukee, Richard W. E. Perrin, Chariman. The project was done under the direction of James C. Massey, then Chief of HABS, and the team members included architect John N. DeHaas, Jr. (Montana State University), Project Supervisor, Mary Ellen Wietczykowski--now Mary Ellen Young--(Milwaukee Landmarks Commission), Project Historian, and student architects Larry Hermsen (Iowa State University), Roger Little (Kansas University), Thomas Sanford (Washington State University), and Donna Woodrum (Virginia Polytechnic Institute). The data was prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS editors Carolyn R. Heath, Mary Farrell, Candace Reed and Philip Hamp. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack Boucher.